

ARTICLE APPEARED
ON PAGE 1

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NEWS ANALYSIS

A Cuba scenario

By William Beecher

WASHINGTON—The Carter Administration is considering borrowing a page from Hollywood in an attempt to settle the mounting political crisis over the presence of a Soviet combat brigade in Cuba.

According to a well-placed source, the technique is known in the movie business as "fade-in, fade-out." A dramatic scene appears on the screen and just as rapidly dissolves.

Applied to the explosive issue of Soviet troops—which the Russians claim are only in Cuba as military advisers and the Administration insists are there as a fully organized and armed combat brigade—the tactic would be to suggest that the shape and duties of the Soviets be changed to conform to Russia's public description.

Thus, the Soviets wouldn't publicly admit anything but they would be expected to:

—Disband the brigade garrisoned at two cantonments west of Havana.

Turn its tanks, artillery and armored personnel carriers over to the Cuban armed forces, which use the same type of equipment.

—Reassign some of the brigade's personnel, especially officers and noncommissioned officers, to advisory duties with the Cubans and discreetly call the others home in twos and threes.

The object of this compromise would be to avoid a humiliating admission and seeming retreat by the Russians, while taking into consideration President Jim-

my Carter's assertion that the "status quo" of the Russian brigade was "not acceptable."

The reason the Soviets might agree—and that is far from certain—is because the compromise might go a long way toward saving the imperiled SALT II, one source pointed out.

Sen. Frank Church (D-Idaho), the chairman of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee and an Administration-commissioned floor general on the treaty fight, has insisted that SALT will not be ratified unless the Russians pull out the combat forces.

Other senators are on the fence for other reasons. Some are unenthusiastic about the terms of the treaty, worried about the relative rise in Soviet military strength and aggressiveness, and disappointed at the Administration's unwillingness to pledge 5 percent defense budget increases in each of the next two years. They see the Cuban issue as a critical test of Carter's ability and resolve in dealing with the Russians and of Moscow's sensitivity to legitimate American concerns.

Assuming the "fade-in, fade-out" scenario is proffered to and accepted by the Russians, how might it be presented publicly, while allowing all sides to save face?

According to one knowledgeable source, Secretary of State Cyrus Vance could appear at a closed joint session of the Senate Foreign Relations and Armed Services committees. He would detail the negotiated solution—stressing, however, the need to maintain secrecy for diplomatic and intelligence reasons.

He then could have Adm. Stansfield Turner, director of the CIA, perform a show-and-tell briefing with reconnaissance photos of tanks leaving the Soviet truck parks and going to Cuban parks, and a discussion of intercepted communications confirming the transformed situation.

Turner might point out that although, partly because of a lack of attention and resources, the brigade slipped in and was undetected for a time, the United States now is determined to focus sufficient intelligence resources on Cuba to assure no

similar activities might elude immediate detection.

The President, perhaps at a press conference, could then respond to questions about inevitable press leaks of the Vance-Turner briefing by assuring the nation the issue had been satisfactorily resolved.

He could argue that discretion prevented him from a full airing of what had been agreed but that the relevant congressional committees had been briefed sufficiently to "satisfy any reasonable man."

If Church and a few others then stood up on the Hill and declared they were satisfied but had been pledged to secrecy, that might be enough to dissolve the crisis atmosphere.

Congressional critics, of course, might point out that if thousands of Soviet military advisers remained in Cuba under any label, they could be quickly assembled into combat units, issued arms, and function as combat troops. But this has always been theoretically possible, and the United States has never raised a peep about Russian advisers in Cuba.

Sen. Henry Jackson (D-Wash.) has insisted that not only the brigade but also advanced Soviet MIG-23 fighter-bombers must go, that the Russians must agree not to provide any more submarines or other sophisticated warships to Cuba.

And Sen. Ernest Hollings (D-SC) wants SALT tabled while a select Senate panel investigates the broad sweep of Soviet and Cuban military activities around the world and what should be done about it.

If the concern in the Senate over Soviet activities in Africa, Asia, the Persian Gulf and the Western Hemisphere has not moderated by November, when the treaty is expected to go to the floor for debate, the whole issue might be put off until spring, Administration and Hill sources agree.

That would throw SALT and questions about the shifting balance of power right into the middle of the presidential primary campaign. Carter and possibly Sen. Edward Kennedy—if by then he is a declared candidate—would presumably be arguing for ratification; and most Republican candidates presumably would be opposing it. Peace, detente and defense would then emerge as a major issue of the 1980 presidential sweepstakes.